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Future of the arts festivals: Do the views of managers and attendees match?

Mervi Luonila and Maarit Kinnunen

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To make sense of the relationship between the festival attendance and the aims in arts festival management, this study explores the key characteristics for success and analyze the perceptions of the future in arts festival productions.

Design/methodology/approach: This qualitative study uses interviews with festival managers and empathy-based stories (MEBS) written by members of festival audience. Discourse analysis is employed for answering the questions: What are the characteristics of a successful festival, and what could ruin it?

Findings: The article highlights the importance of interaction with the audience orchestrated by the festival organization. Such interaction co-constructs a more holistic festival experience valued by both parties, which supports the sustainability and future success.

Research limitations/implications: The research data is limited to one country, and music festivals dominate the data.

Practical implications: Among managers, there is a need to consider audiences as consumers and as producers in the current competitive climate in the arts and cultural field and clarify the role of the audience as a partner in the networked festival production by placing the attendee at the core of the strategic planning process of arts festivals.

Originality/value: The research combines the views of the demand-and-supply side. It adds to the knowledge in arts and festival management by exploring the relationship between attendance and the aims of

arts festival management in general, and the key characteristics of success in the arts festival context in particular. MEBS offers new interesting opportunities for future research in qualitative festival research.

Keywords: Arts and cultural festivals, discourse analysis, future, success factors, failure, MEBS

Introduction

Increased competition from the growing and multifaceted supply of arts content in contemporary society is evident in the cultural field. During the era of “festival fever” (Négrier *et al.*, 2013), various project-based festivals stage arts contents for broad audiences at a rapidly increasing volume (Yeoman *et al.*, 2015). Concomitantly, alongside the offerings provided by the arts institutions’ conventional arrangements, the arts organizations use the festival form to boost innovativeness or provide unexpected content to inspire and surprise their audiences (Jordan, 2016; Klaic, 2014; see also Dantes and Colbert, 2016). This ongoing trend is obvious, evidenced in the increase in the size and number of festivals, and has been substantially reconstructed the current cultural setting (Jordan, 2016; Richards, 2015), starting since the Second World War (Klaic, 2014) and continuing more rapidly since the 1980s especially in Western societies (Olsen, 2013). In the music field of the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, Webster and McKay (2016, back cover) state that “festivals are at the heart of British music and at the heart of the British music industry. They form an essential part of the worlds of rock, classical, folk and jazz, forming regularly occurring pivot points around which musicians, audiences, and festival organizers plan their lives.”

Indeed, in recent years, festivals have turned into evermore dominant platforms for cultural production, distribution and consumption (Bennett *et al.*, 2014; Négrier, 2015; Richards *et al.*, 2015). The trend was defined by Bennett and others (2014) as the “festivalization of culture” referring to two different connotations: first, how audiences and other stakeholders experience and participate in the arts (Bennett *et al.*, 2014; Jordan, 2016; Maughan and Bianchini, 2014) and second, how the arts are produced in society, which constantly seeks agile, flexible and cost-effective means to organize artistic content (Négrier *et al.*, 2013; Jordan, 2016; Quinn, 2010; see also Luonila and Johansson, 2016). Albeit the connotations reveal relevant research streams in the arts management field, there appears to be a paucity of research concerning

festivals as a way to produce arts for audiences (e.g. Jordan, 2016; Klaic, 2014; Luonila, 2019; see also Chong, 2010). In addition, as Getz and Page (2016) argue, research concerning the futures of events is scant in the overall, while Nordvall and Heldt (2017) mention that the demand and supply sides of festivals are scrutinized infrequently in a one and same study. Given the increasing competitive climate of cultural production at the current crux of arts production and consumption, knowledge about participating in the arts and experiencing them in the festival context from the viewpoints of the organizer and the attendee is undoubtedly needed. We argue that this approach facilitates understanding about the changing economic climate, cultural trends and audience demands (Newbold *et al.*, 2015) in the constantly reshaping forms of supply in the arts field (see also Chaney, 2012). Consequently, research on the creation of a successful festival experience and the factors related to its production (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a) is required for generating better knowledge for the planned event experience (Getz and Page, 2016) and assisting forecasts on the sustainable future of festivals (Mair and Whitford, 2013; see also Mair, 2019; Yeoman *et al.*, 2015).

With the aim to make sense of the relationship between the festival attendance and the goals in arts festival management, we build in this study on the perceptions of the future and the analysis of the key characteristics of success in festival productions. Focusing on the shared views of audiences and festival managers, the purpose of this qualitative study is to compare the scenarios set in the future produced by both parties. The visions are analyzed based on the question: What are the characteristics of a successful festival, and what could ruin it? Thus, the objective is to gain understanding of how the perceptions differ and in which areas they resemble one another. In this way, the study contributes to the literature of arts and festival management from the point of view of attendee evaluation and participation motivation. In addition, the study enhances understanding of the pivotal strategic directions in arts festival productions from the perspective of their most vital stakeholder: the audience (see e.g. Getz *et al.*, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2008).

The paper is organized as follows: First, the theoretical background of the study is discussed considering the supply and demand side of festivals in terms of the festival form and the role of audience in festival production. Second, the methodology is described. Thereafter, the discourses are described concretizing the relationship between festival attendance and the objectives of festival management. Finally, the results are discussed, and conclusions are drawn, together with suggestions for future studies.

Theoretical Perspectives

Supply side: Festivals as a Means of Producing Arts for Audiences

According to Mair (2019, p. 4) “there are a range of characteristics that make problematic to define festivals in one brief sentence”. In this study we explore *arts festivals* as organized bodies that aim to produce unique and holistic experiences for attendees through the celebration of artistic content and a sense of community beyond everyday life, while attracting audiences (Jordan 2016; Morgan 2008). The approach refers to the creation of a content-driven and festival-specific product consisting of artistic content produced in an event series and essential services (Getz, 1989) designed to support the festival’s mission in a temporary festivalscape (see Gration *et al.*, 2011; Luonila, 2019).

Collin-Lauchad and Duyck (2002, p. 68) state, citing Evrard (1993), that festivals are a “prototype industry” where the festival experience makes up the core value for attendees (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014), and the key to the success of a festival is the ability to present the major pull factor, the experiential setting delivered at the festival (Gration *et al.*, 2011; Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Morgan, 2008). The content of arts festivals results from a creative act (see Colbert, 2007) and the setting of the festival, which might be associated with a sort of multifaceted stage for arts at the “festivalscape” (Gration *et al.*, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2008). This combination links the nature of festival production and consumption to the performing arts: The attendee consumes the festival as an entirety in an act of interpretation with other attendees, artists and stakeholders at a predefined time and a designated place throughout the “performance” (Orosa Paelo and Wijnberg, 2006; see also Morgan, 2008). Thus, value is created at a particular time and place, influencing the creation of a unique festival experience. The allure of the offering experienced by festival attendees is entirely beyond the pre-testing opportunities typical in performing arts (see Kotler and Scheff, 1997). The year(s)-long planning of the combination of artistic content and essential services culminates in a one-time-only delivery (Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002). In this context, in addition to high-quality artistic content (Klaic, 2014), success is measured by the number of visitors more precisely than in the arts field in general.

According to Klaic (2014), festivals might be seen as “pioneers, innovators and experimenters in the contemporary cultural practices of production, presentation and dissemination” (p. 39-40). Although

seasonality characterizes the organizational structures in the arts (Abfalter *et al.*, 2012), Klaic's argument builds on the special status of the festival form from the supplier perspective. He notes that the role of the festival as a cultural player differs from institutional arrangements due to the intensive, short-term character (Klaic, 2014). To fulfill the fundamental task of maintaining cultural celebration and thus, enabling a kind of a laboratory for artistic content, festival organizations, as suppliers of arts, tend to take more risks. The production structures of festivals are widely defined as hybrid networks lacking permanent walls or staff and consequently, being pivotally different from the established cultural institutions (e.g. Getz *et al.*, 2007; see also Getz and Andersson, 2008; Luonila and Johansson, 2016).

The organizational structure of festivals might be seen as an example of a project organization (Larson and Wikström, 2007) where the year-round action is conducted by a lean organizational structure, while the number of actors involved in the production of the artistic content and the festivalscape increases exponentially closer to the festival implementation (Abfalter *et al.*, 2012; Hanlon and Jago, 2014; Johansson, 2008). This changing networked production structure results from the nature of the production per se and from the resources needed in the festival production in terms of artistic content, economic properties and knowledge capital (Abfalter *et al.*, 2012; Andersson and Getz, 2007, 2008; Getz and Andersson, 2010; Johansson, 2008; Luonila and Johansson, 2016; Stadler *et al.*, 2014). As Abfalter and others (2012) state, the festival as a semi-permanent project organization builds on the expertise of various skills and knowledge and "pulsating festival organizations rely on the expertise of various stakeholders in dealing with certain aspects of the festival" (Stadler *et al.*, 2014, p. 42).

This set of characteristics distinguishes festivals from individual concerts, art exhibitions or programmed concert series offered at arts institutions as a means to produce arts for audiences (Luonila and Johansson, 2016). Bearing this in mind, in this study festivals represent contemporary arts organizations that embed characteristics of modern organizations such as "temporality, virtuality and project focus" (Abfalter *et al.*, 2012, p. 4).

Demand side: The Role of the Audience in a Festival Production

Current research provides evidence of the audience's emphasized position in the production networks of festivals (e.g. Getz and Andersson, 2010). One approach considers the multi-level economic, social and cultural impacts on festival localities resulting from economic, social and symbolic exchange intertwined with festival attendance (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Dwyer and Jago, 2019; Getz, 2015; Luonila and Johansson, 2015; Quinn, 2019; Whitford and Ruhanen, 2013). Another viewpoint refers to the attendees' role as co-producers in festival productions. Gyimóthy and Larson (2015), for instance, place the attendee in a key role in organizational learning and festival organization development with manifold practices, procedures and perspectives. They highlight the audience's strategic role in marketing activities (see also Luonila *et al.*, 2016; Luonila *et al.*, 2019) and emphasize attendees' contribution to the creation of the community on social media outside the peak season (see also Hudson and Hudson, 2013; Suomi *et al.*, 2018).

Recent studies focusing on the co-created festival experience place the audience in a fundamental position during the events (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2017; Nordvall *et al.*, 2014) and exemplify the festivals' uniqueness as "collectively experienced multi-phase events" (MacKay *et al.*, 2017, p. 687). Studies of the meaning of shared rituals and practices (Taalas, 2006; Tjora, 2016; see also Kozinets, 2002) in festivalscape have identified a sense of community that refers to the festival's importance in the creation of the festival experience (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a; van Winkle and Woosnam, 2014). The attendee is "upgraded to [a] more active role" (Gyimóthy and Larson, 2015, p. 334) in the recent literature focused on production networks in the festival context. Instead of festival attendees considered solely as recipients of the "arts delivery", the audience embeds various meanings in the production process (Getz, 2012; Rihova *et al.*, 2015).

Thus, regarding festival attendance, the focus is not only in monetary aspects. Instead, the focus should be on the concrete nature of attendance, participation (not spectatorship), and its impact on the success of festivals (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a). Attendees influence the vitality of festivals by consuming and producing the festival experience (Lee *et al.*, 2008) in order to gain personal benefits, like enjoyment or self-development, that act as push factors for festival attendance (Morgan, 2008). From the management point of view, according to recent literature, possible interactions must be identified to enhance the opportunities to find the

contact points and value co-creative nodes in the production processes to sharpen the opportunities for co-developing mutual benefits and values (Luonila *et al.* 2019), because, as White with others (2009) argue, “high levels of engagement in co-production enhance individuals’ contribution to the co-creation of positive value and make their participation in future co-production opportunities more likely” (p. 775). According to White *et al.* (2009), this emerging loyalty creates a competitive advantage for the arts organization. Consequently, we argue that in the festival context audiences should be regarded as consumers and as producers. Demand for identifying and developing the means to place the attendee at the core of the strategic planning processes of arts festivals is increasing and hence, in the focus of the present study.

Research Context, Design and Methodology

Context

The context of this study is Finnish arts festivals. The history of arts and cultural festivals in Finland began in the latter half of the 19th century and the European trend of song festivals (Amberla, 2013; Rantanen, 2013). Currently, in a nation of 5.5 million citizens, the festival field is flourishing, and the number of festivals per capita in Finland is remarkable. Hundreds of productions (between 500 and 800; Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a) driven by not-for-profit and for-profit organizations, as well as public authorities, offer a variety of music from different genres, theater, film, dance, literature, fine arts and so forth. Finns are also active attendees; the umbrella association of Finland Festivals (FF) reported that its 81 member festivals generated approximately two million festival visits in 2016 (FF, 2019). The attendance continued at the same level in 2018 generated by 79 member festivals (*ibid*). However, FF represents only part of the festival field in Finland, and therefore, the total attendance is hard to estimate (see Karttunen and Luonila, 2017). Building on this diverse and nationwide festival net, festivals hold a remarkable position in the Finnish cultural setting (Karttunen and Luonila, 2017) especially in the arts and cultural consumption in summertime. As several authors state, festivals operate as essential actors and platforms for arts production, distribution and consumption in Finland (Karttunen and Luonila, 2017, see also Amberla, 2013; Kainulainen, 2005), providing a relevant and suitable setting for the present study (see also Luonila and Johansson, 2015).

Data Collection and Analysis

To comprehend the relationship between festival attendance and the aims of arts festival management, a qualitative method was employed to explore this complex phenomenon in its context (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). The study compares scenarios of the future produced by arts festival managers and audience. With the aim of gaining understanding on how the perceptions differ and in which areas they resemble one another, data was collected from 13 festivals organized throughout Finland, representing several cultural genres (Table 1), and it consists of 17 thematic interviews with festival managers and 51 empathy-based stories written by attendees.

The festivals selected for this qualitative study vary in terms of size, life cycle, production structure and artistic content. There are eight music festivals, one dance, film and theater festival and two visual arts events. Thus, we have used multiple sources of evidence to allow a pervasive set of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues to be addressed, herewith to foster sense making and new insights on the phenomenon, and to produce convincing and explicit findings and conclusions (Yin, 2016; see also Weick, 1995). The details of the festivals are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key information about the case festivals

*Small = fewer than 5,000; Medium = 5,000–10,000; Large = more than 10,000 daily attendees.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Face-to-face thematic interviews were conducted with festival managers in 2012 and 2013. The tape-recorded and transcribed interviews included two questions concerning the future: What is the worst-case scenario that the festival could face, and what could be a sunny future for the festival? The research data on audience perceptions was collected using the Method of Empathy-Based Stories (MEBS) that is a non-active (passive) role-playing technique for collecting data (Eskola, 1988). Empathy-based stories are a suitable data collection method especially if the purpose is to study perceptions of the future (Eskola, 1997a) and, in our case, they are particularly useful since research participants might have never experienced a festival that was a total disaster. In this study, the stories were in a near future (2015) and in a far future (2027) as the year of the data collection was 2012.

In MEBS, the research participant is given a description of a situation, a “frame story”, and asked either to continue the story or to describe the preceding course of events in writing. The actor in the frame story can be either the writer or an imaginary person. The term “empathy” in the name of the method does not refer so much “to the emotion of empathy but more to perspective or role taking actions, i.e. ‘applied empathy’ to a situation or role” (Wallin *et al.*, 2018, p. 2). Typically, there are two frame stories that vary in one essential detail (Eskola, 1997b), usually having one with a successful outcome and the other with a failure (Wallin *et al.*, 2018). The stories reflect writer’s perceptions and expectations of the human behaviour in different situations (Eskola, 1988, p. 241) and they are suitable for “examining the participants’ perceptions, expectations, mental images, and values regarding a specific phenomenon” (Wallin *et al.*, 2018, p. 3).

In our case, the variation in the frame stories appeared in both the outcome and time, having a frame story about a successful festival in 2015, a disastrous festival in 2015 and a successful festival in 2027. For example, the frame story of a successful festival in 2027 stated: “Imagine that it is the year 2027. You participate in the event x where the atmosphere is awesome. You are excited by the event. What has happened? Use your imagination and write a small story about this.” Thus, the actor of the story was the writer and the task was to imagine oneself in a fictional situation (see also imagine-self instructions in Davis *et al.*, 2004). Only one frame story was assigned for all the research participants. It was sent by e-mail to 249 festival goers who had given their contact information and permission to be contacted for research. They were asked to use 15-20 minutes (Eskola, 1997a) to write the story and 51 responded, giving the response rate of 20%. There were 20 stories about a successful festival in 2015, 18 stories about an unsuccessful festival in 2015 and 13 stories about a successful festival in 2027. As is typical of MEBS, the respondents’ background data was not stored, allowing the analysis to concentrate solely on the contents of the stories (Eskola, 1988, p. 289; Wallin *et al.*, 2018).

The data was analyzed with discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2004) in order to identify the different ways one can represent the future of festivals and to identify which features are valuable and relevant to either target group. There is no single, “right” way of conducting discourse analysis (Burr, 2003) because it is a framework rather than an analysis method (Jokinen *et al.*, 1993). In discourse analysis, the aim is to find repetitive expressions and representations of the studied phenomenon in the given context (Fairclough, 2004;

Jokinen *et al.*, 1993; Pietikäinen and Mäntynen, 2009). Any discourse analysis is always a construct of the researcher (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen, 2009), even though it uses the respondents' own voices and words, aiming at the respondents' perspective.

Discourse analysis is typically based on various discursive genres containing data from different actors, which is attested in several event and festival studies that rely on discourse analysis (Gibson and Davidson, 2004; Gorman-Murray *et al.*, 2012; Kallus and Kolodney, 2010; Smith, 2014; Wilks, 2011). When collecting information from different target groups related to festival production and consumption, it is customary to interview festival managers, municipal authorities and business partners and to conduct surveys to obtain attendees' or residents' opinions on a large scale (Gibson and Davidson, 2004). We used interviews with managers and empathy-based stories with festival attendees. The aim of employing several discursive genres is to provide a more holistic picture of the studied phenomenon (see also Gummesson, 2002) but also to minimize the weaknesses of one data collection method with the strengths of another (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In interviews, the researcher and the interviewee are in an interaction, providing a two-way information flow in order to construct interpretations in collaboration (Johnson and Turner, 2003). The researcher continues the interpretation during the transcription process, making decisions about what to include and what to omit, for instance, regarding body language, tone and emphasis (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). Empathy-based stories, on the other hand, are written by the respondents without the presence of the researcher. These stories do not have such predefined cultural roles as interviews, but they conform to the traditional norms of story-telling (Sandelowski, 1991) and "are often based on culturally shared genres and meanings" (Wallin *et al.*, 2018, p. 8). For the present study, empathy-based stories are suitable since they encourage theory building rather than hypothesis testing (Eskola, 1988), offer the possibility to distance oneself from the situation, make it possible to deal with situations that do not happen in reality and employ the respondent's own words (Eskola, 1988; Wallin *et al.*, 2018). The use of two different data collection methods enabled us to confirm that the constructed discourses were present in the representations of both groups of actors, regardless of the discursive genre.

The constructed discourses built on the *perceptions of the future*, summarized in Table 2, were festival renewal, the sense of community, quality, commercialism, external threats and technological opportunities.

Table 2. Discourses of the future

[Insert Table 2 here]

Considerations on research bias

The first writer has been involved in festival productions as well as in a variety of development projects concerning arts festivals. In the present study, she focused on the festival management perspective based on the interview material from festival managers. The second writer is a frequent festival goer who studies audience experiences, and empathy-based stories are part of her research data. Consequently, we have similar kind of experiences on festival production and consumption as our informants, causing a possible bias towards inside knowledge. We collected the two sets of data independently without knowing about each other. The mutual research interest was found only afterwards when discussing the preliminary findings in each other's data and noticing that we had both collected data on the future of festivals. All the shared research data was anonymous and the shared interview transcriptions included only answers to the questions about the future of festivals.

Even though only one festival (Provinssirock) was present in both data sets, the analysis shows the similarity in the managers' and audiences' views regardless of the festival and its genre. The interviewed festival managers comprehensively represent the selected cases in the area of festival production management, including managers in charge of artistic, technical and administrative activities. The MEBS participants, on the other hand, were festival goers who had participated in a research survey on festival experiences, which was distributed by 12 arts festivals in 2012. In the survey, they had indicated that they can be contacted for more information and hence they were asked to write the empathy-based stories under study.

The researcher influence in the data collection phase was naturally greater in the face-to-face interviews than in the MEBS. It has to be noted, though, that the interview questions were open-ended. The validity of findings was increased by the fact that the audience, with a different data collection method, pointed out the same issues as the managers, even though the emphasis might have been different. The analysis, as indicated earlier, was influenced by the researchers' background even though it was data-driven.

Findings

Next, we present the discourses presented in Table 2 in more detail to concretize the relationship between festival attendance and the festival management's objectives. In describing these discourses, we point out the factors that could ruin the festival or make it exceptionally successful.

Festival Renewal

The festival renewal discourse represented saturation in terms of the number and the similar content of festivals in general. The festival managers pointed out the threat that the audience would not consider the artistic content interesting enough, whereas the audience complained that the lineups, especially in rock festivals, were too similar. A manager from Pori Jazz described the situation:

Oversupply, I mean all these concerts that are held and festivals and such. And then implausibility, it is that you organize such - in principle everyone calls it a festival. You organize a big concert, fence the area a bit, have one big star and do not actually produce any kind of experience or product or infrastructure. It has a bad effect on us as well.

The attendees emphasized that interesting festivals should have innovative and surprising content, while the managers wondered if they had enough resources to produce an innovative program. Another Pori Jazz manager wondered whether they could renew the festivals without losing their attractiveness. In this discourse, the audience suggests that a successful festival provides a versatile program that offers a-ha moments and introduces interesting new artists. For the managers, the bravery of being innovative in strategic management was stressed by avoiding "sticking in the old ways" and "snuggling in the overall cozyness" (manager, Porispere).

However, interestingly, in the case of the hallmark event Pori Jazz, one of the most iconic festivals in Finland, the meaning of tradition and heritage were identified as well. Renewal was seen as crucial but only by valuing the heritage created over 50 years. A balance between renewal and tradition was present in attendees' perceptions as well, especially in the context of another iconic Finnish festival, the Midnight Sun

Film Festival. The attendees presented the concerns of excessive renewal that might override the original idea of the festival, “film fanaticism.”

The Sense of Community

In general, managers defined the need to socialize as one of the key issues of festival attendance that enhances the vitality of the event. Music festival managers considered the sense of community strongly intertwined in the festival brand, whereas in the case of the niche theater festival *Lain§uojattomat*, a manager described the community as necessitating a physical presence: “As an optimist, I hope that somehow that kind of sense of community will start to come up that people want authentic experiences [contrary to the virtual ones on social media].”

In the empathy-based stories, the audience perceived the sense of community as more multifaceted and linked it directly to various dimensions of the festival atmosphere. Among the audience representations, the focus of the sense of community was the importance of “quality time” with friends and the opportunities to meet new people. For the attendees, the sense of community meant a suitable number of, but not too many, people. Remarkably, there were some rules concerning behavior at a festival: Fellow attendees should be respected by letting them be in peace, there is no hurry at the festival, attendees should have a positive and tolerant state of mind and being too drunk violates the sense of community. In the empathy-based stories describing the positive future scenarios, the sense of community and atmosphere beyond everyday life (Morgan, 2008) were co-created with sing-alongs, dancing and jamming together, thus, resulting from shared practices in a particular time and place (Taalas, 2006) with congenial (but not similar) people (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a). As one attendee stated:

And we twanged the guitar and rattled whatever gear we could find, sang well out of tune, now and then delicately in tune as well, also those who never otherwise sing. Folks in the neighboring tent were similar-minded, a real guitarist was found there, one who really could also play, more songs, hooray..! (audience member, imaginary successful Ilosaarirock 2015)

Community participants comprise mainly the audience but also include the volunteers and artists. According to the attendees, a successful festival has enough personnel to avoid queues for services, and at an ideal festival, the artists are approachable providing opportunities for discussions (see also Luonila *et al.*, 2016).

An attendee wrote:

The teachers were fantastic and the level of the courses was just suitable for me. I also met new wonderful people who share the same hobby-passion with me. At the age of 30, I just felt like being among people of my age and of my kind. (audience member, imaginary successful Kuopio Dance Festival in 2015)

Notably, for the audience, the community extended to local residents and service providers (see also Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015b), and the attendees considered this inclusion a characteristic of successful festivals. According to the attendees, “hiding” unfortunate locals (alcoholics and poor people) or excessive favoring of the festival audience might ruin the festival experience.

Quality

For the managers, quality was connected to the content and brand (see also Dantas and Colbert, 2016). They stressed that the artistic content was the core of the event. However, they considered the services offered at the festivalscape to be crucial complementary and supportive elements of competitiveness. A manager at Provinssirock reflected:

My personal goal is to reach the level where the success is not dependent on the headliners only, that we could really build the festival services in such a way that it would be a unique experience.

In terms of the artistic content, the managers confessed to feeling pressure from making right or wrong decisions during the programming process (see also Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002). Additionally, especially regarding music festivals, managers felt stress about the overall (dis)attractiveness of Finnish festivals as places to perform. The other side of the coin was that there were worries about the increasing production costs: In the 2010s, especially in the rhythm music field, artists’ fees exploded placing programming on the “treadmill of art and economy” (see Luonila, 2016). One manager described a critical

threat in the future: “The prerequisites for creating a high-quality program disappear. I mean that the preconditions for building the program within a reasonable, realistic price disappear” (manager, Pori Jazz) (cf. Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002). However, the managers recognized the potential for international collaborations with other festivals in booking artists and emphasized the possibilities of foresight (see also Luonila and Johansson, 2016), meaning that the “hunch of success” before an artist breaks through cannot be underestimated.

For the audience, quality consisted of two parts: content and services. The quality of the content consisted of a versatile artistic program that provides opportunities for personal development. Regarding the services offered at the festivalscape, the audience emphasized the importance of the quality of the food offerings and not surprisingly, clean toilets. Many of the attendees had enough of the greasy fast food (“festival grub”) (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a). Attendees sought opportunities to taste local specialities and food made of local ingredients; they desired breakfast, ethnic food and vegetarian choices with better price/quality proportion. The audience looked for and was ready to pay for restaurant quality and thus, challenged the festival organizations to improve their quality control especially regarding food services.

The quality of the toilets was discussed under this theme as well as it forms one manifestation of cleanliness, fluency of the services and arrangements in general. As one attendee wrote:

Toilets are clean around the clock, I mean, as clean as porta potties can possibly be. There must be toilet paper available and a possibility to wash your hands nearby. And naturally, enough toilets, after all, we haven’t come here to queue. (audience member, imaginary successful Ilosaarirock 2015)

Commercialism

Among the audience, the commercialism discourse referred to changes concerning the essence of the festival, whereas the managers pondered it more holistically. The fear of commercialism, discussed by the attendees, was exemplified by the calculative program (Waterman, 1998) and junk vendors, which could ruin the festival atmosphere. An important consideration within the discourse was the pricing during and of the festival, referring to the ticket and service prices. The audience dreamed of lower, reasonable pricing and

even free-of-charge events. Increased pricing would increase the amount of money needed to attend festivals and could be interpreted as greed. An attendee stated plainly: “The price of food and drinks would have risen at the level of insanity!!” (audience member, imaginary failure of Provinssirock 2015). In addition, the negative connotations within this discourse were linked to the growth of VIP services in the festivals whose character these services would not match.

Among the managers’ representations of commercialism, a manager from the Lain\$uojattomat theater festival mulled the line between commercialism, entertainment and the arts. The manager argued that there is a threat that commercialism might be reflected in the meaning of the arts and thus, erode its position in society. The interview included a deliberation about attendance in general and the desire to experience the arts in particular. The manager questioned if the audience actually wanted to be challenged by the arts:

The worst-case scenario would probably be that the audience was no longer interested in what’s going on in the field of theater. I think that’s the worst scenario for the future of the theater. Is it going to be extremely one-sided or simplistic, and is it so that theater just has to entertain. Well, of course, theater must entertain, but, somehow, is it so that people do not want to [be challenged to] think anymore?

External Threats

The external threats discourse emerged from topics about nature and economics. In relation to the nature discourse, the themes were practical, such as the weather or more complicated notions of climate change. Interestingly, the managers considered the weather an unmanageable phenomenon that was just a given. A manager from the Porispere rock festival stated: “[For] the final two weeks, you constantly check the weather forecasts and bite your nails.” The viewpoint anticipated if the audience arrived, tickets are sold or losses take place.

In contrast, the attendees considered the weather a “here and now” issue. However, the frame stories were formulated in such a way that the writers of the stories were already present at the imaginary successful or failing festival, not just planning to attend. The writers assumed that the organizers were familiar with the

varying weather conditions of the Finnish summer and that they were prepared to look after festival attendees' well-being and convenience in any circumstances. The empathy-based stories provided illustrations in which there were shelters against the rain and the sun, as well as blankets to protect against the cold. Nevertheless, many stories also underlined the attendees' own responsibility for bringing relevant clothing for the weather.

In addition to the weather, the external threats discourse covered climate change. The managers highlighted the negative impacts of climate change especially from the extreme weather conditions point of view. The threats were connected to possible safety risks, such as thunderstorms like tempest or tornados, phenomena that occurred, for instance, at the Sonisphere festival in Pori, Finland, in 2010 (Finnish national broadcasting company, YLE, 2010). Additionally, other unmanageable outlooks, such as ash clouds or nuclear disasters, would impact festival productions: "This kind of natural phenomenon, what can you do? That Chernobyl would blow up next door or an ash cloud, [meaning that] nobody wants to come here or none of the artists can arrive" (manager, Pori Jazz). Interestingly, climate change was identified in only one of the attendees' empathy-based stories where the respondent described the results of climate change with a sense of humor:

After the rise of the seas, the [former] residents of Varsinais-Suomi and Uusimaa [coastal regions of Finland] would want to return from their asylum, Scandinavian Mountains nearer to their old home district. Kuhmokajaani [a made-up vast northeastern district illustrating the trend of merging municipalities] resembles after all more Helsinki than Arvidsjaur [by the Scandinavian Mountains], asylum of the Finnish [climate] refugees. (audience member, imaginary successful Kuhmo Chamber Music 2027)

The general economic situation, for which one has to adapt in planning and budgeting, was considered a given reality among managers. They wondered whether people would consume the arts and culture or attend festivals during a recession. This view contradicts that during economic downturns, people tend to increase domestic travel and reduce travel abroad (Marin, 2009). This is evident in Finnish festival attendance as well: According to FF statistics, the number of festival attendances and tickets sold increased during the years of recession in the 2010s, reaching the current apex in 2015 (FF, 2019). In 2015, FF reported that its member

festivals sold 822,000 tickets, whereas the number of festival visits was estimated to be more than 2.3 million. In 2016, the increasing trend ended, which might be a result of the changed reporting methods or due to the variation in festival productions (FF, 2019).

Managers could consider varying economic circumstances as an opportunity rather than a threat, as a manager from Porispere put it:

But if we now have a festival ticket of 50 €, it really doesn't matter in practice if we had a rather deep recession. People anyway save from other things [...] During the recession people save from the trips to the south, but they do conduct smaller trips and seek smaller experiences locally and cheaper.

Technological Opportunities

This discourse emphasized digital technology where managers of larger festivals saw opportunities to reach the audience year round. From the management point of view, social media and other e-marketing solutions were seen as vehicles to connect audiences more closely to the festival before the event and thus, as a means of expanding attendance beyond the actual stage of the event (Berrige, 2012; see also Hudson and Hudson, 2013), that Berrige (2012, p. 274) describes pre- and post-stages.

The audience, however, brought up practicalities, such as working network connections to support the follow-up of online information. The concrete ideas were descriptions of electronic notice boards providing information about the queues:

Is there room in the licensed area, food stalls, toilets or in front of the stage? This way you can avoid the most overcrowded areas or be prepared to go to different areas early enough for queueing.
(audience member, imaginary successful Ruisrock 2027)

The audience presented solutions, based on technology, for other common challenges at large events: harnessing technology to locate friends, to browse introductions to service providers at the festivalscape or to prebook complementary services during the event. The more visionary perspectives provided predictions of

automatic safety control, possibilities of controlling the stage volume individually, up to producing and loading personal festival experiences or “holistic virtual experiences” at the post-event stage. Thus, the discourse provided in-depth illustrations of the future assisted by technology, as an attendee described:

We got to a little fun park that was built for the festival participants and the flying cameras captured the events non-stop. We were connected with the virtual total experience with all the other partygoers and it was possible to enjoy the event even days after. (audience member, imaginary successful Ruisrock 2027)

However, the positive influence of technological opportunities was contested. In this case, a manager from the Lainšuojujattomat theater festival discussed technology as a potential threat to active participation in the arts and culture:

What happens to all the culture and the consumption of culture and arts? Does the interest of the people fall flat? Do they just want to lie on sofas and hang around on Facebook? Somehow, the battle with sofas, home sofas and social media, media...Do people still want to see live things? Do they just want to meet virtually?

Discussion

Emphasizing the significance of the shared views of audiences and festival managers, we analyzed the perceptions of the future for arts festival productions with the aim of making sense of attendance as a negative or positive experience and its potential reflections to the management. The discourses constructed in this study defined and concretized the managerial perspectives of festivals' future, and several factors were associated with a successful festival experience by the audience. The findings express the multifaceted nature of arts festivals, where the discourses were constructed around festival renewal, the sense of community, quality and commercialism, external threats and technological opportunities.

The most dominant threat in the festival managers' talk was that the audience would not consider festivals an interesting way to participate in and experience the arts. This viewpoint was present in all the discourses in one way or another. In many cases, the threat was intertwined with the aspect of the rising cost of the artistic

content resulting from increasing competition, especially in the context of music festivals as Nordvall and Heldt (2017) have pointed out. The managers delineated a future with exploding costs causing a negative influence on a festival's vitality, alongside "given" threats such as the weather or the general economic situation.

In the discourses, partly originating from the chosen data collection methods, the topics discussed by the managers were more general whereas the viewpoints presented by the audience were detailed, especially within the quality discourse. The attendees discussed the quality of services at a practical level, such as requiring queue-free events, clean toilets or good food, while the managers considered the "overall offerings". However, more profound thoughts were represented in the attendees' viewpoints when they described the sense of community or technological opportunities.

Among the attendees, increasing ticket and service prices or excessive "development" were recognized as risks for a successful festival experience. Increasing production costs might be seen as an overall threat encasing the characteristics of "the treadmill of art and economy" (Luonila, 2016). The term refers to the fundamental challenge in arts management, which is emphasized in the festival context (see also Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002) where critical resources are held by other actors in the networked productions rather than the organization itself (Getz *et al.*, 2007; Johansson, 2008). To maintain the vitality and tackle the challenge of the treadmill, the managers highlighted renewal of content and good-quality services as critical factors in future success. The quality was connected to the festival brand (see also d'Astous *et al.*, 2006) and identified as a tool for building a high-level reputation for the festival. In the managers' representations, this was seen as a way to mitigate the risks resulting from the unpredictability (i.e., attractiveness and reception, as well as supply and accessibility) of the artistic content. Renewing the festival is considered a means to avoid a downward spiral and a "contracted and impoverished" future of the festival (Luonila *et al.*, 2016, p. 472; see also Nordvall and Heldt, 2017). Notably, these perceptions were in line with the views of the audience as well.

Attending arts festivals was an important part of life in the future, due to the festivals' social and cultural significance for attendees. This significance might be explained by the multifaceted meanings embedded in

the festival community that were discussed as consisting of various elements like the staff and volunteers, the characteristics of the festival locality, meeting friends, making new acquaintances or sharing a moment with an artist. These viewpoints emphasize the immateriality of the desired value in the festival experience (Getz *et al.*, 2017) and exemplify the arguments of simultaneous production and consumption in the festival context (Luonila, 2019). Altogether, these findings are in line with MacKay and others (2017, p. 687) who state that the festivals' unique character might be defined as "collectively experienced multi-phase events".

Regarding the arts festivals as a way to produce arts for audiences, the findings support Gyimóthy's and Larson's (2015, p. 334) arguments that in the arts festival context, the "customer orientation is more than just identifying and satisfying needs; it is about interactively co-creating value with customers". According to them, the role of festival management is to facilitate the creation of the festival experience through different practices, such as customer insourcing, crowdsourcing or community consolidation (Gyimóthy and Larson, 2015). Notably, as they state, consumer participation varies remarkably in each phase and thus, demands different strategies for enabling them a valuable and beneficial role in the production process (Gyimóthy and Larson, 2015). It is imperative to find procedures that foster interaction and refrain from old habits and self-satisfaction in arts festival management. The variety of contact points created between the attendees and the festival organizer is a remarkable strategic tool in project-based and networked festival productions. The interaction in the contact points is not only a mode to foster the pure practicalities required in the arts festival experience but also a guide to the ways to find mutual values for attendees and managers in the production processes of the future festivals.

The theoretical contribution of the study is threefold. First, it adds to the knowledge in the academic literature of arts and festival management by exploring the relationship between attendance and the aims of arts festival management in general, and the key characteristics of success in the arts festival context in particular. We focused on festivals as a way to produce arts for audiences, offering views on how to improve the festival experience and thus, nurture loyalty toward the festival (Cole and Chancellor, 2009). The research on consumer experiences tends to concentrate on positive experiences (Ritchie and Hudson, 2009) whereas our view includes negative ones as well, thus pointing out critical aspects of the festival production. Second, research combining the views of the demand-and-supply side of festivals is scarce (Nordvall and

Heldt, 2017), even though a better understanding of how people participate in the arts and experience them from both the demand and supply side is undoubtedly needed. This study provides new insights into this area, combining the views of the audience (demand) and organizers (supply). The findings of the study unveil the similarities and differences in the perceptions of the future as defined by both parties in the festival context. The data demonstrate the importance of interaction as a strategic choice and the use of shared views of future as potential reflection on the network management in the festival context. Third, we contribute to the theoretical discussion on co-creation and co-production. Although the idea of co-creation was introduced quite early (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) and is studied in arts management literature (Chaney, 2012; White *et al.*, 2009), the topic is still emerging in the context of arts festivals. Haanpää (2017) scrutinized the co-creation activities of festival volunteers, Rihova (2013) studied customer-to-customer value co-creation, Gyimóthy and Larson (2015) examined co-creation strategies from the social media viewpoint, and van Limburg (2008) had a management-oriented view examining co-creation with the help of specific lead users, whereas Luonila and others (2019) explored the value co-creation mechanisms in the context of festivals. Against this background, our study gives indications of the need to involve members of the audience more profoundly in the festival production process.

Methodologically, the study proves the value of empathy-based stories (MEBS) and thus, expands the use of qualitative methods in exploring festivals. MEBS has been used in event and festival research only once (Kinnunen and Haahti, 2015a) but more frequently in sociology, social psychology and pedagogy (Tuorila, 2013; Wallin *et al.*, 2018). Empathy-based stories proved to be useful when obtaining information about the perceptions of the future (Eskola, 1997a), which makes them a potential inexpensive tool for testing different co-production scenarios without the actual implementation. It has to be taken into account, though, that a positive and realistic future is sometimes more difficult to describe than a catastrophe (Eskola, 1988, pp. 295-297). Additionally, the number of empathy-based stories needed is low because the saturation point is typically reached in 15 stories per one frame story (Eskola, 1988). This estimation proved to be correct in our case as well. MEBS is a data collection methodology that minimizes researcher influence and offers new opportunities for qualitative festival research. Interestingly, member checking procedures (Harvey, 2015; see

also dialogic editing in Feld, 1987) are not normally used in combination with MEBS. However, asking for participant feedback on the analysis might open up interesting methodological potential.

The value of this study for arts festival managers is the findings concerning attendees' position in the networked festival productions. According to the results, the audience already has a central role in festival productions, identified by audiences and managers, in the co-creation of the festival atmosphere at the "actual stage" of festival's realization (Berrige, 2012, p. 274). However, as saturation can be found in terms of the number and amount of similar content of festivals in Finland, as well as in Western societies in general, it is important to take festival attendees into account as partners in the improvement of the festival co-production even in the pre- and post-event stages (Berrige, 2012). Identifying success factors revealed the need for deeper dialogue between festival managers and audience. The interactive means can assist in the creation of the contact points for co-production processes and facilitate the engagement between the festival organization and its invaluable attendees. This approach places the audience at the core of the strategic planning process of arts festivals and enhances a sense making of the dimensions of meaning that the festival creates and is attached to it by attendees (see also Luonila, 2019).

Conclusions

The analysis of the shared views in this study facilitates understanding of the production, consumption and design of festival experiences and contributes to knowledge creation of arts festival attendance and its reflections to the management. The success of a festival is often measured by economic figures, relating to the number of attendees, revenue and profit (Andersson and Getz, 2009). More recently, the measurements have shifted towards the social, cultural and environmental impacts (Mair and Whitford, 2013; Pasanen *et al.*, 2009) as well as long-term effectiveness through the use and non-use values (Andersson *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, the ability to attract audiences is the key issue for the sustainability of any festival in the long run. The analysis showed that both the audience and organizers consider festival renewal, quality and the sense of community essential factors in a festival's success or, rather, attractiveness, whereas commercialism and technology could, when wisely applied, produce extra value. All these areas could be developed with

well-planned co-production measures. Co-production could also be a tool for avoiding negative outcomes regarding the festival experience, like commercialism and - in some extent - external threats.

We argue that in the festival form, active communication and interaction are strategically valuable tools for maintaining and developing the required bond with the stakeholders of the production (see also Collin-Lachaud and Duyck, 2002; Luonila *et al.*, 2016). Understanding of the potential contribution to the practices and procedures during each phase of co-production is highlighted in the most essential stakeholder, the audience. The interaction with the audience orchestrated by the festival organization enables the co-construction of a more holistic festival experience valued by both parties, which supports participation in festivals and hence, the economic, social and cultural impacts and long-term effectiveness resulting from arts festival production. Indeed, this kind of a multidimensional sustainability links undeniably with the future success of any festival (see also Mair, 2019).

For managers, there is a need to consider audiences as consumers and as producers in the current competitive climate in the arts and cultural field to understand the ideals and pleasures desired by attendees (Johansson and Toraldo, 2015). The questions to be considered are: What are the dimensions of meaning that the festival creates and attaches to its attendees (see also Luonila, 2019), and why might the attendees “place a different value on a particular impact than another” (Robertson *et al.*, 2009, p. 161)? These approaches employ the naturally existing relationships and networks beyond the festival organization itself (see Stadler *et al.*, 2014) and clarify the role of the audience as a partner in the networked festival production by placing the attendee at the core of the strategic planning process of arts festivals. At practical level, festival organizers could employ empathy-based stories in their development work. They could create frame stories embedding various plans for future co-production which they could pretest with trusted pilot users. In the frame stories, the new ideas could be introduced with a successful or a disastrous outcome and the participants could write their perceptions of the course of events in these scenarios. Thus, organizers would be able to weight the possible consequences of the plans before any expensive and risky implementations.

To conclude, although the research data is limited to one country, and music festivals dominate the data, the originality of the findings clearly show the need for further research on critical success factors in the arts

productions in the era of “festivalization of culture” (Bennett *et al.*, 2014). It would be beneficial to enlarge the research setting to the field of arts organizations. One fruitful avenue of further research could be the examination of critical factors in the future success in arts institutions, particularly in the current era of diminishing public funds for arts institutions (see Wood, 2017). In addition, it would be interesting to explore the critical factors in the future success of arts festivals as defined by other stakeholders than the audience, such as public authorities and business-related stakeholders. These perspectives would assist a thorough analysis of the strategic opportunities of arts festivals and thus, enhance sense making of the prerequisites concerning the sustainability of festival productions.

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Table 1.

Festival (location)	Content	Size	Established	Organization	Data (informants)
Ilosaarirock (Joensuu)	Rhythm music	L	1971	Not-for-profit	8 empathy-based stories (audience)
Porispere (Pori)	Rhythm music	M	2011	For profit	2 interviews (festival managers)
Provinssirock (Seinäjoki)	Rhythm music	L	1979	Not-for-profit	10 empathy-based stories (audience) 4 interviews (festival managers)
Ruisrock (Turku)	Rhythm music	L	1970	For profit	9 empathy-based stories (audience)
Pori Jazz (Pori)	Rhythm music	L	1966	Not-for-profit	5 interviews (festival managers)
Seinäjoki Tango Festival (Seinäjoki)	Music, dance (tango)	L	1985	For profit	4 interviews (festival managers)
Kuhmo Chamber Music (Kuhmo)	Classical Music	M	1970	Not-for-profit	9 empathy-based stories (audience)
LuostoClassic (Sodankylä)	Classical Music	S	2003	Not-for-profit	1 empathy-based story (audience)
The Outlaws Theatre Festival (Pori)	Theater	S	2000	Not-for-profit	2 interviews (festival managers)
Midnight Sun Film Festival (Sodankylä)	Film	S	1986	Not-for-profit	7 empathy-based stories (audience)
Kuopio Dance Festival (Kuopio)	Dance	M	1970	Not-for-profit	3 empathy-based stories (audience)
Retretti Art Centre (Punkaharju) Bankruptcy in 2012	Visual Art	M	1978	Not-for-profit	3 empathy-based stories (audience)
Naïvistic Art at Iittala (Hämeenlinna)	Visual Art	S	1989	Not-for-profit	1 empathy-based story (audience)

Table 2.

Discourse	Interviews of festival managers	Empathy-based stories written by audience members
Festival renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festivalization: everything is called a "festival" • How to renew oneself with the available resources while respecting the legacy of the festival 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many festivals resemble one another • Interesting and versatile program offering surprises • Valuing the core ideas and traditions of the festival in the festival renewal
Sense of community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental need for meeting people • Part of the atmosphere, especially at rock festivals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential part of the atmosphere • Participants (audience, volunteers, artists) co-create a sense of community • Dimensions: socializing with friends, meeting new people, a suitable amount of people, a code of conduct, volunteers, artists, locals, and local service providers
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-quality content versus increased production costs and the remoteness of Finnish festivals as venues • Brand • Services in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content • Food services • Clean toilets • Festival management's responsibility to control the quality
Commercialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple entertainment versus challenging people to think 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats to the unique atmosphere of the festival: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Elevated pricing ○ Calculative program ○ Junk vendors ○ Unsuitable VIP services

External threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather • Climate change • General economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather, but organizers should take different weather conditions into account in their arrangements
Technological opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of social media to prolong the experience and to ensure year-long visibility • Social media threatens live cultural events by engaging potential participants in virtual world only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing online information about queues and event schedule • Locating friends through the use of smartphones • Individual experiences delivered through videos at the post-event phase